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WELCOMBE HILLS,

NEAR STRATFORD UPON AVON,

A

P O E M,

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE;

BY JOHN JORDAN OF STRATFORD, WHEELWRIGHT.

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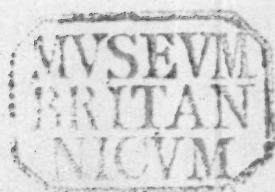


The WEST VIEW of WELCOMBE HILLS.

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L O N D O N :

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DEDICATION.

To the accomplished MRS. LLOYD, Relict of the late Worthy JOHN LLOYD, Esq; of Snitterfield, near Stratford, this Poem is humbly dedicated,

BY HER MUCH OBLIGED

AND MOST OBEDIENT SERVANT,

JOHN JORDAN.



T H E
P R E F A C E.

IT may be observed in the Notes accompanying the little fallies of imagination which form this Poem, that the time of it leads back to the sixth century, when the Saxons harassed this part of our Island, under the command of Crida or Cridda; and who, after many struggles for dominion and superiority, having met with success, united the sixteen or seventeen provinces which he had subdued, into (what was then reckoned) one pretty large kingdom, and gave to it the name of Mercia.

A general account of those early troublesome times may be met with in most of our English historians and antiquaries, who yet are little more than transcribers of what occur to them in Gildas and Bede; and they only inform us of the devastations and revolutions which this our Britain suffered from our northern invaders, without descending much to particular events.

The design of the following Poem was, an humble attempt to describe a few of the transactions that
may

P R E F A C E.

may be supposed to have happened in this inner part of our land, at the above-mentioned period; and on a spot, which, to the Author, seems in many respects suitable to such purposes. One of his friends has assured him, from an observation made by Dr. Plot, in his letter * to Dr. Fell, in the last century, that "No good account of English history is to be had for 330 years before the conquest." If this be the case, and such the opinion of inquisitive and industrious searchers into antiquity, we must now despair of meeting with authentic materials to fill up the chasms with true history; and if we would say more on these matters, we must endeavour to entertain ourselves (I mean such of us as can be so entertained) with probabilities only.

How far the Author of the ensuing composition has succeeded this way, is humbly submitted to those, who, in consideration of his peculiar circumstances, may, besides an unprejudiced perusal, permit him also a candid allowance. His mean situation in life almost totally deprives him of those learned assistances which gentlemen, inclined to inquiries of this

* See Dr. Plot's letter, printed in Hearn's edition of Leland's Itinerary.

fort,

P R E F A C E.

fort, may readily have recourse to; nor could he have introduced so many (he hopes not disagreeable) particulars, but for the kind communications of some obliging friends, who thereby tempting him to commit the whole to the press, have, he doubts, shewn themselves rather too partial in his favour. However, as he fairly declares himself below criticism, he intends to avail himself of the situation of the complying reed; that is, readily to stoop a little, if he can stoop any lower, and safely let the blustering storm, the rattle of quills, pass unregarded over him.

Kind Readers, accept with his thanks this sincere representation from him, who would not willingly let ingratitude have a place amongst the number of his offences,

JOHN JORDAN.

C O N-



THE
C O N T E N T S
OF THE
P O E M A N D N O T E S.

- I. **T**HE subject and design of the Writer, to which he was led by curiosity.
- II. A cursory view of the great intrenchments called the Dingles, adjacent to the Hills ; and that they are the works of the Saxons.
- III. The savage disposition, and manner of fighting of the ancient Britons.
- IV. A description of a Fairy-ring, and its formation poetically accounted for, with the manner of the dancing and music of those diminutive beings.
- V. A description of that remarkable artificial eminence to which the name of Welcombe Hill is peculiarly appropriated ; with the cause and manner of its erection.
- VI. The character and station of the British general named Yddo.
- VII. The station of Crida the Saxon leader ; with mention of a few of the Saxon customs religious and military.
- VIII. An engagement of the Britons and Saxons ; in which Yddo the British Chief is slain, his troops defeated and despersed, and forced to flee for refuge to one of their contiguous castles ; with a description of that fortress.
- IX. An episode of a love-scene that happened at the brook which supplied the castle with fresh water.
- X. Crida the Saxon chief arrives at the fortress which sheltered the routed Britons ; he lays siege to it, and after being often baffled, weakens it by a stratagem, then takes it by storm, and demolishes it.
- XI. A general mention of Crida the Saxon's subduing seventeen of the inner British provinces, and forming them into one kingdom, to which he gives the name of Mercia.
- XII. The names and qualities of two of the first distinguished families that settled at, and had possession of Welcombe.
- XIII. Pleasant prospects, from Welcombe Hills, of the adjacent country.
- XIV. Honourable mention of the present proprietor of the estate at Welcombe.
- XV. The Author's commendation of the hills, as a subject worthy of the pen of a superior genius ; and that its being slighted and neglected hitherto, was a principal inducement, however indifferently, to undertake the celebration of it.

WELCOMBE HILLS.

ON Welcombe Hills I tune my willing verse,
Point out their beauties, and their fame rehearse,
Their ancient fame shall elevate my lays,
A subject worthy of the Muse's praise.
Upon these Hills one pleasing morn I stray'd
To see what art and nature there display'd :
The DINGLES * first attract my wond'ring sight ;
Their grandure gave astonishing delight :

B

Such

* The word Dingle, used by Milton in his Masque of Comus, is a compound, signifying double angle ; plainly observable in the sides of this great excavation. It is indeed a noble intrenchment, of a considerable length one way, and has a shorter branch shooting from it ; so that, take the whole work together, it appears not much unlike to the form of a Y.

Such bold Intrenchments, form'd by Saxon hands
 To stem th' incroachments of the British bands,
 In depth twice twenty feet, with angles grac'd
 And turnings quick, in due proportion plac'd 12
 So short, no arrows (for no thund'ring guns
 In times of yore were us'd by Albion's sons,)
 Nor scythed chariots here could cut their way,
 In battle's rage whole ranks of troops to slay :
 Yet, on a plain engag'd, or on a slope,
 The charioteers their speed could dextrous stop
 As they saw cause, could instantly alight,
 And terribly on foot maintain the fight ;
 Then, if not fortunate, their reins they'd seize,
 Remount their carrs, and drive elsewhere with ease,
 Flying like light'ning o'er the embattel'd plain,
 Strewing the fields with heaps of heroes slain ; 24
 With blew-stain'd bodies, and with aspect fierce,
 Daring through legions disciplin'd to pierce.
 Such,

Such were the dreadful methods *, Julius says,
 The savage Britons us'd in former days;
 'Till, from their conquerors humane, they learn'd
 (What naturally they never had discern'd,)
 That generous sentiments should fill the mind,
 And brutal rage be to mere brutes consign'd;
 That unrelenting violence has fail'd,
 While lenient arts have happily prevail'd.
 To these retreats the wary Saxon flew
 When gloomy night its sable curtains drew; 36
 In these intrenchments safe their leaders slept,
 By faithful Centinels from danger kept.
 Near to these Chafms I trac'd my winding way,
 Till to a fairy-ring † I chanc'd to stray:
 This in my mind a novel fancy bred,
 And with myself contemplating, I said

Perhaps

* See Cæsar's Commentaries, Books the ivth and vth.

† For the different opinions concerning these field-rings, or fairy-circles, as they are commonly called, see Dr. Plot's History of Staffordshire, chap. i. who bestows eight or nine pages on the subject.

Perhaps 'twas here some hardy hero stood,
Engag'd his foe, and shed his hated blood
In single combat *, for some virgin's charms :
Inspir'd with beauty, here prevail'd his arms ;
The vital stream gush'd from the gaping wound,
And stain'd with crimson this fair figur'd round ; 48
There clotted lay, 'till silver Cynthian's train
Lighted the fairies on the verdant plain,
With jocund revels here to frisk and play,
Free and unscorch'd by Sol's inclement ray.
Their music sounded soft, harmonious, sweet ;
Around they skip'd and danc'd with airy feet,
Till Oberon, their princely leader, stood
And look'd aghast, scenting the human blood !
He bid his Sprights their jollity forbear :
They in an instant stopp'd each tuneful air,

Cover'd

* It was customary among the pagan Saxons that their younger soldiers should make trial of their courage and dexterity, with their weapons, in single combat, before they could be admitted to any command of dignity in their armies.

Cover'd the loathsome gore with grafs and flow'rs,
 And leaves collected from the neighb'ring bow'rs: 60
 These rites perform'd, the elves, 'till rising day,
 The act recorded in melodious lay;
 The Ringlet then appear'd with brighter green
 Then e'er before upon the turf was seen;
 Its colour ever will unfoil'd remain
 By sheep or oxen, grazing on the plain;
 Succeeding springs its verdure will renew,
 And spread fresh beauties to the shepherds view.
 From hence I climb'd the ruddy cone-like hill*,
 Which did my mind with various fancies fill:
 I judg'd, this pyramid, with labour wrought,
 Rose by materials from th'intrenchment brought; 72

C

Form'd,

* This hill, which oftner bears the name of Welcombe than the others which are contiguous to it, is yet much the smallest: it is situated betwixt the intrenchment call'd the Dingles, and a building which is called Welcombe-house: it has very little the appearance of a natural eminence; and if we may judge from others of a similar kind, we may very reasonably pronounce it an artificial one. There is much such another, about 43 feet in height, at a place called Seckington, one of the most northern villages of Warwickshire, at about a furlong's distance from the church, which is commonly declared to be an artificial hill: near this also are the remains of a notable fort.

See Bp. Gibson's additions to Warwickshire in Camden's Britannia.

Form'd, there's no doubt, for some important end,
 But what 'twas for, none fully apprehend :
 In northern Realms indeed, from times of old,
 Such art-built mounts their warriors bones * infold ;
 And, from discoveries, 'tis almost clear
 That ancient practice was transplanted here,
 That when a much-lov'd chief in battle dy'd,
 His faithful soldiers this way testify'd
 Their dear respects ; collected his remains,
 And o'er them rais'd such trophies on the plains,
 That, though hard marble tombs decay and waste,
 These monuments, long as the world, might last. 84
 Works of great labour they undoubted were,
 But of the toil the men had equal share,
 No hands were † unemploy'd ; one part convey'd
 The sods, which others in due order laid ;

And,

* Near Kennet in Wiltshire is a hill called Selbury ; it rises to a considerable height, and by the sliding down of the earth about it, seems to have been cast up by men's hands. Of this sort are many in that county called *barrows*, perhaps, says Camden, raised in memory of soldiers there slain, the bones of men having been found in them.

See the article Wiltshire in Camden's Britannia.

† Among the northern people, every soldier, who survived a battle, was to bring his proportion of earth, towards raising a monument for his fellows slain on the spot.

See the article Wiltshire in Camden's Britannia.

And, if the chief well merited his praise,
The higher they the turfy pile would raise.
Such on the downs of Wilts and Hants are seen,
Proud swelling mounts, some with rich verdure green,
Some on their summits bare, some crown'd with trees,
Whose waving tops one at a distance sees.
In western parts those trophies of the dead,
By name of BARROWS are distinguished: 96
On Mercia's plains their numbers are but small,
And those, by name of LOWES * our records call;
Thus Knightlowe, Pathlowe, Brinklowe, terms well known,
From the same cause their appellation own;
Nor is't improbable this cone-like hill
At Welcombe, rais'd with no small toil and skill,
Covers with mould at top, beneath with stones,
Of heroes slaughter'd the much-honour'd bones.

Nor

* For the meaning of the word *Lowes*, see Dugdale's Warwickshire, in the account of Knightlowe hundred.

Not far from hence the British Yddo * stood,
 With martial joy his warlike troops review'd,
 A numerous host, bold and prepar'd for fight,
 Whose glitt'ring spears seem'd beams of distant light. 108
 Another hill †, hence scarce a bow-shot wide,
 Was by a Saxon army occupy'd :

CRIDA ‡ their chief on this his Standard plac'd,
 Which, as his arms, a painted courser § grac'd ;
 And lower down the hill, while time remain'd,
 Their breathing steeds they for hot service train'd :
 This done, they next prepare their sacrifice,
 And send their reeking odours to the skies ;

Whole

* Yddo or Ghwyddo, for his military virtue, was chosen commander of the British forces in these parts: a man of great spirit, of much intrepidity, and one who, in all probability would not have been without success, had he had a less experienced General for his antagonist than Crida the Saxon.

† This is vulgarly called Spyfford or Spyford-hill, as is conjectured from its being opposite a fordable part of the river Avon.

‡ Crida or Crida a Saxon prince, after various struggles, not only with the Britons, but with his brother Saxons too, who were rivals of his power ; became, according to Dr. Heylin, and others, the first king of Mercia ; the last and largest of the kingdoms of the Saxon heptarchy. This happened about the year of grace 542.

§ The ancient Saxon device or coat of arms, was, on a field gules, an horse salient argent. In later times the Mercian princes changed it, according to Heylin, to azure, a cross in saltire argent ; and instead of the crest, a radiated coronet.

now the
 Arms of
 Kent

Whole hecatombs of victims blood they spill'd,
 Steeds, lambs and heifers by their priests were kill'd:
 The Spot * remains where their great altars smoak'd
 When they their idol Gods in form invok'd. 120
 Their harsh shrill trumpets next sound loud alarms,
 The leaders ord'ring to advance their arms;
 Swift o'er the plains th' invaders march along,
 To Thor and Woden † then their clamours rung,
 In haste they made the charge, like tigers fierce,
 In hope the hardy Briton's ranks to pierce:
 With no less rage the Britons met their foes,
 The vallies ecchoing forth their galling woes;
 A glowing ardour fill'd each champion's breast,
 These would subdue, those would not be oppress'd;
 'Twas liberty the British legions fir'd,
 And conquest the bold Saxon host inspir'd. 132

D

On

* An eminence on Spyford-hill.

† Thor and Woden, from whom two of our weekly days, Wednesday and Thursday, take their denomination, were two of the chief pagan Saxon deities.

See Verstegan's restitution of decay'd intelligence.

On Yddo's* hill, from whom it takes its name,
 To close attack the desp'rate soldiers came :
 Here was a dreadful carnage, nor was't known
 Which of the armies first wou'd be o'erthrown ;
 Till the invaders shew'd abated heat,
 And made, or seem'd to make, a forc'd retreat ;
 Soon down the hill they march'd, as if subdu'd,
 The British host as eagerly pursu'd,
 When, from a neighb'ring wood strange shouts were heard,
 And soon in view fresh Saxon troops appear'd.
 Ah, hapless natives of fair Albion's isle,
 Thus fatally distress'd by foreign guile !
 Ah! what avails your brav'ry in the field ?
 Your lion's rage to foxes craft must yield ;
 Nor was it likely your sad shatter'd band
 Should a fresh host of enemies withstand :

144

These

* Yddo's or Ghwyddo's-hill, since corrupted to Whiddle's-hill, has within these few years been chiefly called Green-hill : it is not far from the modern Clopton-house, the seat of John Partheriche, Esq.

These were a well-train'd corps of Saxon horse,
Who nimbly shunn'd the rapid chariot's course,
Then whirl'd about, and instantly assail'd
The British rear, and soon, too soon prevail'd!
The isle-born chief with grief and rage survey'd
Amongst his followers the havock made,
How many sunk into eternal night,
Others preparing for their speedy flight; 156
With javelin in hand, erect in carr,
His troops accosted thus, in wild despair:
“ My brave companions, you that scorn to fly,
“ Or slavery hate, of Yddo learn to die!
“ Had our great Gods thought fit to save our host,
“ Small cause our treach'rous foes should have to boast;
“ But--something we have done to cause Heaven's ire,
“ That pow'r deserts us, and we must expire!”
This said, his scythed carr he onwards whirl'd,
And sent whole ranks to seek another world,
Till

'Till a sharpe battle-axe divides his head,
 Dashing him down amidst the vulgar dead. 168
 Ill-fated prince ! if bravery might save,
 Longer thou'd'st liv'd, or had a peaceful grave ;
 But bravery, undisciplin'd, gives way,
 And chiefly stratagem must bear the sway.
 This battle held, by intervals, some days,
 Each army bent t'acquire a victor's praise,
 'Till the brave natives Chief by numbers fell,
 And, as I said, gave name to Yddo's Hill.

Twas near that gate that leads to Bury's plain *,
 The Britons were dispers'd, their leader slain :
 Resolute still captivity to shun,
 In wild disorder from their foes they † run, 180
 Nor cease their speed, with wounds tho' forely pain'd,
 'Till a safe bulwark of their own they gain'd ;
 Here

* Bury's plain is a large ground, or close, as some call it, now known by the name of Saulbury's piece.

† Camden in his Britannia mentions, that the ancient Britons, as well as the old Gauls, their friends and contemporaries on the continent, were alike bold and forward in any dangerous enterprize; and likewise upon encounters, alike easily dispirited, and ready to decline and give over the conflict.

Here rudely ent'ring, spent with loss of breath,
 They found a respite from immediate death.
 On a steep * eminence this castle stood,
 Gracing the banks of Avon's silver flood
 In stately pride, with lofty turrets crown'd,
 It had commanded all the country round :
 With martial weapons it was stor'd within,
 While waving banners on its top were seen,
 But what more fenc'd this yet unconquer'd place,
 A spacious mote encircled all its base ; 192
 And that no proper caution they might spare,
 In times of danger or impending war,
 An high-rai'd Beacon on a turret fir'd,
 Brought to their aid th' assistance they requir'd.

Near to this mount and fort a fountain flow'd,
 Around its brink sweet shrubs and flow'rets blow'd,
 Whose grateful odours, which they round diffuse,
 To a fair maid they owe, as sings the muse ;

E

Her

* This eminence to this day bears the name of Castle-hill.

Her name Welfreda, beautiful and young,
The boasted theme of every poet's song;
Her parents joy and care, lest this sweet flow'r
Should blighted be in an unhappy hour. 204

Not far from hence, in a secure retreat,
This happy pair had fix'd their decent seat;
Bless'd with a competence, their darling rear'd,
And daily saw how still fresh charms appear'd:
And when, for sake of health, she would repair
To these inviting hills, to breathe fresh air;
They caution'd her, never to tempt her fate
By wand'ring far, or staying out too late.

Not far remote, at INGEN, a wild spot;
Uncultivated once, now blest with happier lot,
Within a cavern, in those early times,
A savage, guilty of atrocious crimes, 216
Held his abode: 'twas in a thicket plac'd,
And hence he issu'd forth for spoil and waste.

As

As on these plains he rov'd one hapless day,
He ey'd the nymph, and mark'd her for his prey :
His horrid looks like basilisks affright !
She knew no safety but in sudden flight :
Swift as a roe from lion's jaws, she flees ;
Ingendo, (such his name) prepares to seize :
In deep distress, to angel-guards she pray'd
That they'd protect a chaste and harmless maid,
Shew her some grot obscure, some covert wood,
Where she his hated footsteps might elude. 228
Now almost spent, the brutal spoiler near,
Her seat of reason discompos'd with fear,
(The monster chacing with an hideous yell,)
In the deep stream th' unwary damsel fell.
Out from a thicket rush'd a generous youth,
Noted for honour, courage, love and truth,
COMBERIO nam'd : his bow with force he drew,
And with an arrow fierce INGENDO flew ;

Then

Then quick as thought he plung'd into the lake,
Who wou'd not venture so for beauty's sake!
He call'd the Naiads to his speedy aid,
And wafted safe to land th' endanger'd maid. 240
This happy rescue much her fear subdu'd;
Pleas'd, though with trembling, she her guardian view'd,
While on her cheek the blush of roses glow'd,
Her small smooth hand neat tap'ring fingers shew'd;
Her neck was white as is the winter's snow,
Her artless locks in auburn ringlets flow,
Which down beneath her falling shoulders hung:
Nor can I leave her sparkling eyes unsung;
Their lustre, like th' enlivening God of day,
Too bright for view, should she their pow'r display:
Her balmy lips were of the ruby's tint,
Where eager love its image might imprint. 252
With rapture fir'd, the youth beheld the maid,
With heart sincere his fond addresses paid;

Obtain'd

Obtain'd permission to attend her home,
(In single state no more again to roam ;)
Proposed his suit, her fires consent obtain'd,
And, e'er 'twas long, that of the maiden gain'd,
With gratitude her guileless thoughts comply'd,
And here the sacred nuptial knot was ty'd;
Heaven join'd their hearts, the rev'rend priest their hands,
And holy words united hymen's bands.
This blissful union, joy diffus'd around ;
"Thrice happy pair!" the neighb'ring hills resound! 264
The swains resolv'd t'immortalise their fame,
Gave to the hills and stream the lover's name ;
And from Welfreda and Comberio, join'd,
The Welcombe name * to hills and stream assign'd.
This chrystal fount the garrison supply'd :
Here the parch'd soldiers drank 'till satisfy'd,

F

Until

* It is said that Cumbe or Combe, in Saxon, signifies a low hollow situation ; and that Cwmm, in the British, means exactly the same.

See the Warwickshire edition of Dugdale's Warwickshire, printed 1767, p. 150.

Until the foe, by stratagem or force,
Turn'd the clear current from its usual course ;
For Crida and his Saxons, not content
With his late vict'ry, on full conquest bent,
The wretched Britons still resolv'd to chase,
And leave them, in the province, name nor place: 276
He close pursu'd, and almost reach'd their rear ;
But speed additional, enhanc'd by fear,
Convey'd the vanquish'd safe within their fort,
Before th' invaders thither cou'd resort.
At length arriv'd, and from all entrance barr'd,
He offer'd to his men immense reward,
High posts of honour, and of gold much store,
To such as durst the oozy mote pass o'er,
And next with ladders the tall ramparts scale,
Or any way, by force or art prevail.
The hazardous exploit was often try'd ;
As oft', by missive stones, th' advent'ers dy'd: 288

Some

Some found their graves within the mirey bed,
Those that pass'd o'er, beneath the walls lay dead :
Perplex'd, and harass'd, ev'ry effort cross'd,
Of his late conqu'ring troops now many lost,
Crida determin'd soon the siege to raise,
Draw off his men, and wait for happier days ;
When luckily, one of his subtle chiefs
Propos'd a scheme which soon dispers'd his griefs ;
Shew'd him the only wholesome spring that run
Within the walls of that strong garrison,
Shew'd him how to withhold that rich supply,
Which done, his foes must yield the fort, or die. 300
The project mention'd, soon was put in force,
And the stream alter'd from its usual course :
Then wild despair through all the castle ran,
And desolation 'mongst its troops began ;
What Saxon prowess only scarce had wrought,
Base art, by tort'ring thirst, to ruin brought!

And

And now the brisk besiegers spar'd no toil,
But back'd with arms their too successful guile ;
Their darts they flung, their batt'ring engines play'd,
The walls and towers shook, a breach was made :
And yet, not tamely, would the Britons yield ;
As long as e'er their weapons they could wield 312
The breach they guarded, dealt their fatal blows,
And shock'd the boldest of their ent'ring foes!
The battle now in all its horror rag'd ;
For conquest these, those in despair engag'd ;
By massy stones or darts or swords or fire,
The furious warriors on each side expire,
Till Crida's troops so forcibly assail'd,
They pass'd the breach, and o'er their foes prevail'd,
Nor any cries for mercy would they hear,
'Till slaughter'd heaps had stopp'd their mad career,
'Till they had spread their devastation round,
And laid the fortrefs level with the ground : 324

So

So stately Troy of old, all Asia's boast,
 By treach'ry more, than hostile force, was lost.
 Some years, 'tis said, this mighty castle stood,
 Chang'd from a druid's fane, begirt with wood,
 Where the mysterious seers their altars rear'd,
 By superstitious Britons much rever'd:
 And though religion false was there maintain'd,
 Yet, from the change, this sage remark was gain'd,
 An edifice, profan'd by war and spoil,
 Ne'er long subsisted on an hallowed soil.

Crida (this last important fortress won,)
 Knew he had still much work which must be done: 336
 And, though his vict'ries here strengthen'd his cause,
 He found he had no length of time to pause;
 That other parts o'th'isle his valour claim'd,
 E'er he could reap the fruit at which he aim'd.
 How he succeeded, what his lucky fate,
 Hist'ry makes needless that I here relate;

G

Let

Let it suffice to say, after much toil,
Ample renown, and much enrich'd with spoil,
His hands long time in hostile blood imbrew'd,
At length full conqu'ror, all his foes subdu'd,
No less than sev'nteen provinces his own,
He now thought fit t' erect his royal throne ; 348
In happy union these his subjects join,
And Mercia's name to this his realm assign :
A kingdom, of extent and strength, much more
Than any Saxon prince here held before ;
Of longest date *, for it retain'd its pride
'Till, for precedence, it with Egbert vi'd,
Who this realm conquer'd, as he did the rest,
And the sole English monarch was confess'd.

But why should I such long digression chuse ?
To more familiar themes return my Muse :

Haste

* Dr. Heylin reckons up no less than 19 princes of the Saxon race that reigned over Mercia, after Crida ; when, for a time, it fell into a state of anarchy ; and in the year 800, Egbert, the 18th king of the West Saxons, having by the conquest of Mercia subdued the whole Saxon heptarchy, became the sole and glorious monarch of all England.

Haste to thy hills, from which too long th' hast stroll'd,
 And sooth thy friends with what remains untold : 360
 Say how Comberio, sprung from Saxon race,
 First of his family, adorn'd this place ;
 That his descendants, though of equal fame,
 Shorten'd to Combe, their ancestor's great name,
 Whose worthy deeds, at proper seasons shewn,
 Through many ages have been handed down :
 In private acts beneficent and just *,
 Loyal and faithful when in public trust † ;
 Of great possessions ‡, which they well employ'd,
 And therefore, long and happily enjoy'd,

Till

* According to Dugdale in his antiquities of Warwickshire, John Combe, in the reign of Henry VIIIth, was, for his known fidelity and prudence, chosen steward of the lands and possessions of the ancient charitable gild, established in the borough of Stratford upon Avon.

† William Combe, Esq; was high sheriff for Warwickshire, in the 6th and 14th years of James Ist, 1608, and 1616 : his son, William Combe, Esq; served also in the same honourable office, and for the same county, in the 1st of Charles IId.

‡ John Combe, Esq; and his son Edward Combe, Esq; were, according to Dugdale, owners of the seat, manor and estate of Clopton, at ruin Clifford, in the time of queen Elizabeth ; we have it also, from the same approv'd authority, that their descendant, John Combe, Esq; was very charitable to the poor of Stratford : he spent the latter part of his days in his own great house, called the College, near Stratford church ; and dying in the year 1614, was buried, and a fine monument erected over him in that church.

Till a late failure in the issue male,
 Turn'd, though unprejudic'd, the lineal scale. 372
 An heiress§ Combe, right well to be ally'd,
 Became the heir of neighb'ring CLOPTON's bride:
 CLOPTON, an ancient family of worth,
 Whose acts munificent have long shone forth:
 Witness the stately bridge* o'er Avon plac'd,
 Which, Stratford, long thy well known town has grac'd:
 Witness the chapel of the ancient gild,
 Which pious CLOPTON also did rebuild:
 Witness thy many poor their alms reliev'd,
 A bounty, gratefully ('tis hop'd) receiv'd:

Such

§ The last noted person of the name of Combe, of the Stratford branch of the family, was Martha, an heiress, daughter of William Combe, Esq; who married Edward Clopton, Esq; eldest son of Sir John Clopton, of Stratford, Knight, and of Barbara, sole child and heiress of Sir Edward Walker, Knight, secretary at war to king Charles Ist, and afterwards garter, principal king at arms, &c. The son of this Edward Clopton, Esq; was also named Edward; who by Martha, daughter of Thomas Middleton of Mundham in Suffex, Esq; had (besides many other children) Frances, his only surviving child, married to John Partheriche, Esq; with him resident at their seat of Clopton, near Stratford, enjoying their extensive family manors and opulent possessions.

* The fine stone bridge over the widest part of the river Avon by Stratford, 376 yards in length, and consisting of 14 arches, under all which the stream constantly flows, was built at the great and sole expence of Sir Hugh Clopton, Knight, Lord Mayor of London in the reign of king Henry VIIth, and who was a branch of the Stratford or Clopton family. This gentleman also re-built the beautiful chapel of the gild in the above-named town.

Such princely gifts adorn'd our former days,
 And, as less equal'd now, claim more our praise. 384

To worthy men, thus having tribute paid,
 I reassume the station whence I stray'd :
 Plac'd on these hills, I scarce forbear to rail
 At that false taste, which reigns, and will prevail,
 To dote on painted † scenes ; which at the best,
 Have nature's charms imperfectly express'd ;
 Form'd by deceit, and that deceit to screen,
 By artificial lights they must be seen :
 But real prospects want no such disguise,
 Day-light and truth, in these, to gild the scene, suffice :
 While birds their joys in notes melodious tell,
 And od'rous blossoms recreate the smell ; 369
 When winds are calm, and firmament is clear,
 How sweet the views in open air appear !
 Hence eastward, Warwick tow'rs attract the sight ;
 And westward, Stratford domes no less delight,

H

Chiefly

† Alluding to landscapes painted on scenes at theatric play-houses.

Chiefly that ancient solemn pile*, whose stones
 Have long enclos'd the much-lov'd Shakespear's bones:
 Some honour hence accrues, but who can claim,
 Or dare to limit his unbounded fame?
 My soaring muse, to humbler thoughts retire,
 Nor try, ambitious, to approach his fire,
 Lest that befall, as Semele † with Jove,
 Be scorch'd, by too near contact with thy love! 408

Let calmer objects now thy pencil grace
 Try if their artless beauties thou can'st trace,
 Fair Avon's stream, smooth flowing thro' the vale,
 On whose green banks young Evan tells his tale,
 His love-sick tale, while Phillis flights the swain,
 And, like too many, glories in his pain.

Here

* The lofty and venerable collegiate church of Stratford upon Avon: in the chancel or choir of which are deposited the remains of the inimitable dramatic poet, Mr. William Shakespear; above whose grave, and fixed to the north wall, is a small not inelegant monument, with his bust to the waist, and his face painted to imitate flesh-colour, according to the absurd taste of those times.

† Semele was one of Jove's ambitious concubines, who having insisted upon saluting him, when he was powerfully electrified, had the sad misfortune to burn her lips.

See an account of the disaster in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

Here rural cotts, and pleasing villa's rise,
And sacred churches bless our happy eyes;
Here nymphs and swains contemplating along,
Now hear the shepherds tune their mournful song;
Alas †; he's dead, who claim'd our former praise,
And raptur'd songs are tun'd to woeful lays, 420
Oh! may the LADY; whom he's left behind
From heaven's gracious hand much comfort find
Long may she live, with peace and wealth possess'd,
Her duteous offspring flourish and be bless'd.
May war no more these hills with purple stain,
But num'rous flocks spread o'er the wide domain,
The shepherd's care, whose innocent employ
Yields him support, with gratitude and joy.
'Lur'd by the landscape, here let bards attend,
Trace the green vales, or rising slopes ascend,

Whence

† The worthy and respectable John Lloyd, Esq; late of Snitterfield, and proprietor of the estate at Welcombe, the author's friend and patron, whose death he particularly laments in these lines, which he has been obliged to alter since the poem was written.

Whence they may be enabled to rehearse

Kind nature's varied charms in flowing verse : 432

Survey each hill and stream, each lawn and grove,

The sweet retreats of balmy health and love :

Thus entertain'd, let them with me unite

To praise the hand which fram'd each pleasing sight,

That sacred hand, from which all comforts flow,

Whether above, or here with us below ;

And may each blessing spread and flourish still

In kind profusion round fair Welcombe Hill.

But hush! my Muse, suspend his tedious lays,

Who, conscious of no merit, courts no praise :

What's here produc'd, he hopes will none offend,

Because these lines an untaught author pen'd ; 444

Who, though the hills of Welcombe rais'd his rhyme,

Ne'er yet presum'd Parnassian heights to climb:

Pleas'd

Pleas'd in his E'fham * vale, and lowly clafs,
 He only drew from fimple nature's glafs;
 'Twas fhe alone inspir'd his humble mind,
 With hiftory, and vague tradition join'd.
 Had fkilful bards this ftory deign'd to chufe,
 It never had employ'd his meaner mufe;
 But as not one thought fit thereon to write
 Struck with the theme, he try'd his fancy's flight,
 And on the fpot this fmall defcription wrought,
 While he enjoy'd his luxury of thought:
 To Stratford then he took his well-known way,
 Sweetly reflecting on the objects of the day. 458

* The vale of Evesham or E'fham, as it is commonly pronounced, is reckoned for the moft part very fertile; abounding with excellent grain for man's ufe, and pafturage to fupply food for an infinite number of cattle. It is beautified with towns and villages, and befides many delightful leffer brooks and ftreams, contains in its bofom the very profitable, as well as ornamental navigable rivers Avon, and part of the Severn. It is of great extent in length, reaching from the Edge-hills north eafterly, to the fine old city of Glocefter in the fouth-weft through the counties of Warwick and Gloucefter, with part of Worcefterfhire; containing therein Stratford, Evesham, Tewksbury, &c.

ns



A
L I S T
O F
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